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In Memory of Cats: The Camera and the Ordinary Moment.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Fine Arts at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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Abstract.

In memory of cats: The camera and the ordinary moment looks at the way in which families use photographs to remember the past. Photography's offer of memory is limited to a visual trace, so strategies of oral telling are examined to interrogate the way in which memories can be recovered from photographs. Martha Langford's study of the similarities between structures in oral culture and the photograph album and Annette Kuhn's strategies for reading family photographs in a broader historical context, are used to examine and recover memories from my own photographic archive. Using moving image to record those memories and then tell how that photographic evidence has shaped my present, is a process suggested by Linda Williams in her writing about how post-modern documentary can use the past to intervene in the present. Other documentary styles, performative documentary and the essay film, offer a structure for personal memories to be revisited and re-presented to public viewers.

Offering a space for personal or specific memories to be understood or related to by a viewer is discussed by Lisa Saltzman, who looks at indexical forms other than the photograph, like casting and tracing. These ideas culminated in my video work, *A Clowder of Cats*, which explores the losses that have been a part of my history, through photographs of the cats my family has owned. The camera gives us a strategy to remember moments that may otherwise have been forgotten, and moving image provides a space for those ordinary moments to be bought back to the present.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family in completing this project.

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low-risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher, Ruth Korver, is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz”.

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1. Beginning.

This project was inspired by a quote by John Berger. In his book, *About Looking*, he asks, “What served in place of the photograph; before the camera’s invention? The expected answer is the engraving, the drawing, the painting. The more revealing answer might be: Memory” (1980, p. 50). Our understanding of the nature of truth in a photograph has changed, but the indexicality of the photographic image is still concretised in our understanding. There is an essence of the past contained in photography, its ability to freeze a moment in time is a reminder that death will happen to everybody.

Berger argues that private photographs mean nothing in and of themselves (1980, p. 53), offering us images, but no access to the personal stories about them. As a filmmaker, I am interested in the possibility that moving image (as opposed to still photography), particularly forms of documentary, can offer us ways to reveal those stories and bring back the dead from the past.

In Chris Marker’s 1962 film *La Jetée*, the narration speaks: “Nothing tells memories from ordinary moments, only afterwards do they claim remembrance, on account of their scars” (1962). We do not remember all the ordinary moments in our lives, only those which are connected to events that are important. Which events become significant to our present lives is not known until time has passed and we can look back.

I began with the idea that perhaps I could record things so that they would not be overwritten in the palimpsest¹ of memory. I could use the camera to find a way to remember the ordinary parts of life; those destined to be forgotten. But even in the digital age, where access to recording devices is ubiquitous, the task of recording everything, all the time, is too unimaginably huge, and the images produced, often became disconnected from meaning when located outside my own story.

Eventually I looked back to my personal photograph albums to see what evidence there was of my life. Which important moments were collected, significant things documented? I found images of people with indeterminate backgrounds, family cats, my sister and I standing in various holiday destinations. I saw myself growing older, and others, family members who had died, disappear. The possibility that video might allow both the recording of the oral history that can be told from these images, and be able to tell it to an audience outside my family, could mean that my history will not be lost when my family is no longer there to tell it.

What began as a way of recording memory evolved into an exploration of the way memory can be revisited using the evidence that is left behind, then, using moving image, can be reconstituted into an understanding of what the past has meant. Everyone's memories differ, even with the same set of evidence before them. How those memories, conflicting and similar, can be told from the

¹The term 'palimpsest' is derived from the ancient practice of re-using parchment or vellum, by scraping off the surface for new information to be written on it. Over time the writing from a previous text may become legible as the surface writing fades. Many ancient texts only exist as palimpsests and modern technology has made it easier to decipher what was cleaned off.

evidence recorded, and then retold in a public space, is what has directed my work this year, culminating in a single channel video work, *A Clowder of Cats* (appendix 7 for script, appendix 8 for final DVD).

2. Private photographs and death.

What is the peculiar relationship to memory which photography has? Berger says that "...the camera relieves us of the burden of memory" (1980, p. 55), allowing us to evidence what we had remembered, so we can return later to the photographs, to confirm the truth of it.

Any discussion about the nature of photography looks to Roland Barthes' seminal book, *Camera Lucida*. Barthes talks about the idea of the photograph as a kind of death, always indexing the referent in a way that is always repeatable (1980). Barthes calls photographs "That-has-been" (1980, p. 77). It is undeniable that what has been photographed at some point existed. The physical process of light emanating from the subject, onto film, or a digital chip, captures a trace of the referent's presence in a way nothing else can (Barthes, 1980, pp. 80-81). Barthes reminds us of "...that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (1980, p. 9). It is this trace of the referent that allows photographs to offer us a moment from the past, a link to those who are dead and that which is absent.

The offer of a trace of something which has been there is part of photography's relationship with truth, however fraught or complex the nature of truth may be. Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*, claims that cheap cameras became available and popular at a time in the western world when the nuclear family was shrinking. Photograph albums filled with images of relatives, evidenced their existence (1979, p. 8). The relationship between photographic evidence

and memory is particularly resonant within the personal context of the family narrated.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes looks closely at a photograph of his mother as a child, outside a winter garden. In this photograph he is able to grasp something of his mother as he remembers her. He does not show us this image: “I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’” (1980, p. 73).



Figure 1. Photographer unknown. Geoff Korver and Rupert. 1993. 35mm photograph, 15 x 10cm. Collection of Mary and Geoff Korver.

John Berger divides photographs into two categories, private and public.

Private photographs are the images that remain part of our personal narrative.

Berger says a private photograph “...is appreciated and read in a context which

is continuous with that from which the camera removed it" (1980, p. 51) . A snapshot of my father holding his favourite cat (figure 1), kept in my photograph album, is a private photograph. Given to a stranger it would only have meaning as an image of a man and a cat, taken at a certain time. Much like Barthes' Winter Garden photograph of his mother, the personal significance is lost when it is viewed by someone who is not participant in the group the image was made to be seen or consumed by. This group is very particular and unique. It includes the sitter (my father), the photographer (possibly my mother), and those who know us well enough to be shown the image in the album in our lounge.

There is a kind of violence in recording a slice of time, in separating the image from the event. Freud's theory of traumatic memory is that it occurs when a memory is sheared away from one's chronological narrative and becomes detached from the flow of time (Harris, 2001, p. 383). Similarly, photographs do not offer us a memory, instead they give us an appearance. Because photographs, unlike memories, do not record the flow of time that they are a part of, like a traumatic memory, they can lose their meaning when they are prised away from the private narratives in which they sit.

3. Preserving the evidence.



Figure 2. Makers unknown (American). Portrait of husband and wife on their wedding day. c. 1890. Albumen photograph on card (cabinet card), rosette, veil, wooden frame with glass, 40 x 31.5 x 7.5 cm. Private collection.



Figure 3. Makers unknown (American). Portrait of man in uniform. c.1915. Gelatin silver photograph, string, butterfly wings, flowers and leaves on paper, wood frame with glass, 40 x 29.6 cm. Private collection.

Geoffrey Batchen, in his book *Forget me not*, deals with photographs which have been embellished in a way so as to strengthen their emotional bond with the viewer. These include daguerreotypes in cases, jewellery with locks of hair as well as a photographic image, and images embellished with wreaths and flowers (figures 2 & 3). He suggests that we don't simply remember in singular images, like photographs, instead memories often include sound, smell or the recall of tactility. The photograph offers only appearances, a signifier of history, rather than offering the sensations that come from remembering something (Batchen, 2004, pp. 14 - 15). "The challenge, then, is to make photography the visual equivalent of smell and taste, something you can feel as well as see" (Batchen, 2004, p. 15). In these embellished photographic objects, Batchen sees some answers to this challenge.



Figure 4. Makers unknown (American). Portrait bust of a young woman. c.1860s. Tintype in elliptical metal pendant on chain with two samples of human hair, 3.4 x 2.5 (pendant). Private collection.



Figure 5. Makers unknown (American). Anna Cora Mowatt. c.1855. 1/6 plate daguerrotype in leather case, with lock of hair and sprig of rosemary, 8.3 x 7 cm. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Locketts and objects which contain hair or parts of the person photographed, as well as the photograph (figures 4 & 5), evoke a double indexicality which Batchen suggests could help bridge the temporal distance of the photograph as death, with the physical immediacy of the human object (2004, p. 76). Rather than returning the dead, the physical elements of the person remind us of our own life.



Figure 6. Makers unknown ("Dudley", Liberal, Kansas). Photograph album. c. 1939 - 1950. Gelatin silver photographs on black paper with ink text, 25 x 33 x 5 cm (closed). Private collection.



Figure 7. Mary von Rosen. Photograph album. c.1920 - 1927. Gelatin silver photographs, white ink, feather, cigarette, cigarette papers, ribbon, wooden paddle on paper, 17.5 x 49.5 x 3.5 cm (open). Collection of Catherine Whalen.

Batchen suggests that albums are sites where a narrative can be formed, often by ordinary people with ordinary lives, who create their own representations of themselves (figures 6 & 7) (2004, p. 57). The ability to generate a narrative, by collecting images and objects together, provides an expanded field of significance to a group of private photographs. Although it is still a private conversation within the family or group who share it, these tactics of memorialisation make the archive of the family active for stories to be told around them in the present. Similarly, Siegfried Kracauer, posits that it is linguistic communication which keeps memory alive. The anecdotes and details discussed and explained to other generations about the photographs collected, keep the fragments of memory alive after the person the stories are told about is gone. (Kracauer, 1977).



Figure 8. Unknown. Langlois/Gelinas album (MP 145/84). Date unknown. Photograph album. McCord Museum of Canadian History.

Martha Langford, in her book *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*, addresses the nature of the family photograph album. She looks at how albums are constructed and how we can revisit and understand family albums that have been disconnected from their owners. From this, it is possible to understand how albums might function as an *aide memoir* not just for the compiler, but also for the spectator. Examining the amateur photographic albums that make up a collection at the McCord Museum of Canadian History, of which figure 8 is an example, she attempts to answer the question, and preoccupation of the family photographer: “*How could you remember everybody?*” (Langford, 2001, p. viii).

She acknowledges that the understanding of the album in prevalent discourse has been as an object of typicality, in which the idea or concept of ‘album’ is considered, rather than the reading of particular albums. She notes the work of

Pierre Bourdieu and his 1960s sociological survey which concluded that the photograph reinforced social groups by confirming their values (Langford, 2001, p. 26). The sharing of an album is done to present the family as it fits into their social order, and according to Bourdieu, individual memory is lost, giving the past "...all the clarity of a faithfully visited gravestone" (1965, cited in Langford, 2001, p. 26). Langford also acknowledges the writing of Julia Hirsch, who looks at albums as a location where families negotiate their public face by editing the album to present the family as it wishes to be seen (2001, p. 29).

Langford reads photographs in line with Berger's continuous context, looking at how they exist within the story of the people who took the images. But, she suggests, removing them from the family does not mean removing their context, instead they are inserted into a new context with different viewing conditions (Langford, 2001, p. 18). If albums taken outside their family are only read by recording the facts that can be gleaned from the images, they become historical information and are seen to have given all they can offer. Text does not change with reading, whereas oral stories change with each telling. Langford says it is important that albums are revisited continuously in the moving present, by telling the stories about them, even if this involves some elements of imagination about the people in them. (2001, p. 61). The idea is not to explain the album, but to experience it.

In looking at Walter J. Ong's, *Orality and Literacy*, which describes the psychodynamics of orality, Langford found similarities between the communication structures used in oral cultures, and the structure of

photographic albums. The processes of repetition, associations, heroes and archetypes, and themes, are structures used in oral cultures. Telling information results in a type of pattern that shapes the organisation of ideas and memories for that group. It is these structures that Langford suggests exist in an album, opening up a new way to understand albums which have lost their private context (2001).



Figure 9. Unknown. "Photographs" (MP 035/92). 1916 - 1945. Photograph album. McCord Museum of Canadian History.

Langford asks us to think of the person who compiled the album and what their voice would say. Likely it would not be details about themselves, but anecdotes that relate to relationships triggered by the photographs (2001, p. 159). One part of her analysis that I found particularly relevant to my practice, was to verbally 'tell' the story of a group of photographs (figure 9), both as compiler and listener. "To understand the album, we need to hear it. To hear it, we must risk a little madness, a little ridicule, and speak it in a chorus of voices"

(Langford, 2001, p. 190). This kind of activity, in an oral culture, brings the past into the present, or at least assimilates it so that it has meaning in the lived present (Langford, 2001, p. 21). The stories she tells about these photographs relate back to her own family and experiences, as well as having an imaginative component to them. If private images in my work are to be placed outside my family context for a viewer, they need to be read, or positioned so they can be read, with the viewer's own imagination and experiences laid onto them.

What interests me about the album in relation to my practice is the possibility for an expanded notion of narrative. The retelling of personal narratives in the present excites me and leads me to wonder what role video could play? Batchen's call for additional sensory elements and emotional intensity to bring images into the present could possibly be fulfilled by the presence of sound and narrative structure. The ability of video to record oral history may be an approach to gathering stories and memories lost from images. Additionally, the process of opening up a work so the viewer can imagine their own stories, may help make relevant my personal stories, to a viewer outside my own family.

4. Art and remembering.



Figure 10. Sophie Calle. *Exquisite Pain* (Count Down - 67). 2000. Photograph. Paula Cooper Gallery.

French artist, Sophie Calle's work, *Exquisite Pain* (2000), is an interesting approach to the way the context around photographs can be expressed to give meaning. An installation in two parts, the first part presents photographs and ephemera from a 92 day trip to Japan in 1984. Each photograph is stamped with a number counting down to the end of her trip (figure 10). She had arranged to meet her boyfriend at a hotel in New Delhi but he never showed up, instead calling her to say he had fallen in love with someone else. The photographs taken in the 92 days take on a new story due the significance of the event that followed.

In the second part of the installation, she pairs her story with stories of other's heartache, finding a connection between her own private pain and the pain of

others (figures 11 & 12). The textual component of the work adds context to the images by pointing to the stories behind them and provides the possibility of multiple points of access.



Figure 11. Sophie Calle. *Exquisite Pain (Day 28)*. 2000. Two embroidery text panels, two photograph panels, embroidery panels: 127 x 56 cm each; photograph panels: 46 x 58 cm each. Barbara Krakow Gallery.



Figure 12. Sophie Calle. *Exquisite Pain (Day 36)*. 2000. Two embroidery text panels, two photograph panels, embroidery panels: 127 x 56 cm each; photograph panels: 46 x 58 cm each. Barbara Krakow Gallery.



Figure 13. Joseph Wright. *The Corinthian Maid*. 1782 - 1784. Oil on Canvas, 106.3 x 130.8 cm. Paul Mellon Collection. National Gallery of Art, USA.

Lisa Saltzman, in *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, looks at Pliny the Elder's myth of the birth of painting, where the Corinthian Maid asks her father to hold a candle up to the sleeping face of her lover, so she can trace the outline of his shadow on the wall (figure 13). Her father then presses clay into the shape and bakes it so she can retain something of him while he is away at war.

The Corinthian Maid's act of tracing offers us a paradigm for the imperative to record with cameras. Saltzman says "Pliny's tale presents that mythic moment when imminent loss drives the impulse to record and remember" (2006, p. 2). The Maid's act is "An anticipatory gesture...preparing herself for the time to come, when all she will have is her memory" (Saltzman, 2006, p. 23). It is not only significant because of the anticipation of his absence, but the act captures an indexical representation of her lover. Incorporating his physical presence

into some kind of trace becomes a barrier against the certainty of death that confronts her.

While this myth has historically been seen as the birth of painting, strategies of projection, silhouetting and casting are the processes at work for the Maid. These processes offer an indexicality of the referent, similar to the way a photograph does, but a more abstract version of the indexical. The Maid's drawing acts "...as a mnemonic device, the silhouette she traces does not give her a fully realised image, a replacement or simulacrum of her lover. Instead, it gives her an outline, a marker, a designated space in which to remember" (Saltzman, 2006, p. 23). In the Maid's trace we can see the presence of a man, but not a particular man we can recognise, which a photograph would offer.



Figure 14. Rachel Whiteread. House. 1993 - 1994. Concrete /Mixed media, installation, 193 Grove Rd, London. Commissioned by Artangel Trust and Beck's, London.

One of the artists Saltzman examines, Rachel Whiteread, makes casts, not of an object itself, but the space around or inside the object. In *House* (1993 – 1994) (figure 14), she has cast the space inside a house. What Whiteread created was a recording of the interior of a space where lives were lived. Still imprinted on the grey cold surface are patterns of wallpaper, the peeling paint of walls, fireplaces around which families may have gathered (figures 15 & 16).



Figure 15. Rachel Whiteread. *House* (detail). 1993 - 1994. Concrete /Mixed media, installation, 193 Grove Rd, London. Commissioned by Artangel Trust and Beck's, London.



Figure 16. Rachel Whiteread. *House* (detail). 1993 - 1994. Concrete /Mixed media, installation, 193 Grove Rd, London. Commissioned by Artangel Trust and Beck's, London.

Saltzman describes Whiteread's work as "A materialisation of absence" (2006, p. 83). We know who lived there, their names and facts about them, but their private moments are gone and it is this absence which is revealed by the work. Richard Shone reacts to this sensibility: "If the details of the lives of a house's occupants are unobtainable, then the kind of life lived there slides in sepia between the eyes and the house's imperturbable façade. We provide our own sounds, smells, explanations, add our own commentary to the anonymous..." (1995, p. 57). It is the possibility of the kind of lives lived that allows us to imagine them in the context of our own.

House itself no longer exists. Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, it was demolished due to public protest, leaving only photographs to evidence its existence (figure 17).



Figure 17. Rachel Whiteread. *House (demolition)*. 1993 - 1994. Concrete /Mixed media, installation, 193 Grove Rd, London. Commissioned by Artangel Trust and Beck's, London.

5. Art and forgetting.

French artist Christian Boltanski uses various evidential ephemera, such as found photographs, lost property, and domestic items, to articulate ideas around human memory and loss. Works like *La réserve des Suisses morts* (*The Reserve of Dead Swiss*)² (1995) (figure 18), *Réserve*³ (1990) (figure 19), and *Monument*⁴ (1985 & 1986) (figures 20 & 21), are examples of works which involve indexical images or objects, but Boltanski arranges them in such a multitude that individual identification becomes lost.



Figure 18. Christian Boltanski. *La Réserve des Suisses Morts* (*The Reserve of Dead Swiss*) (detail). 1995. Room installation, Church of Santo Domingo de Bonaval, Santiago de Compostela.

² *La réserve des Suisses morts* (*The Reserve of Dead Swiss*) is an installation made from biscuit tins, with images of dead Swiss, taken from obituary notices, pasted onto them.

³ *Réserve* is an installation work made from collections of lost property. Clothes, which have lost their owners, still preserve the trace of the person who wore them.

⁴ *Monument* is an installation in which Boltanski used a school photograph from 1951 and reproduced the faces in settings which had an almost shrine-like quality.



Figure 19. Christian Boltanski, *Réserve*. 1990. Mixed media.

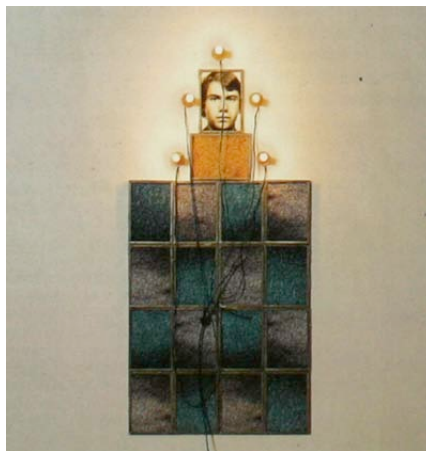


Figure 20. Christian Boltanski. *Monument*. 1985. Mixed media, 330 x 160 cm. Lisson Gallery, London.



Figure 21. Christian Boltanski. *Monument*. 1986. Mixed media, 330 x 160 cm. Lisson Gallery, London.

Carola Kemme, in her brief biography of Boltanski, alludes to the notion that Boltanski's projects of remembering, are in fact, about the futility of such a practice. The multitude of the dead Swiss, the clothing, and the faces of the

children in *Monument*, serve to remind the viewer that we forget. She suggests that "...the ideas of preservation, accumulation, and stacking in museums, depositories, archives, and cemeteries [are associated] with the primary characteristic of the masses – anonymity" (Kemme, 2006, p. 131).

Aleida Assman suggests that Boltanski's work does the opposite of helping us remember, instead the enormity and anonymity of the archive before us reminds us that we will forget and be forgotten; "... the storage capacity of the archive has long exceeded the barrier of that which can be translated back into human memory" (Assman, 2006, p. 95). Things archived, are associated with remembering. What Boltanski does is remind us that in actual fact they will become part of forgetting.

For much of this year I have been using my cell phone to photograph the image I wake up to, in an attempt to record what I will otherwise forget (appendix 1). No morning is exactly the same but each is so much the same that in no way could I tell you details about what each day that followed each picture entailed. I also recorded what I was looking at every hour for a day on a number of individual days (appendix 2). Looking back over these I cannot decipher anything special about those days. It may turn out that, as Calle's photographs did, or in line with the theme of *La Jetée*, these images take on some significance in terms of a future event, but presently they only offer a record of the things I have forgotten because of the anonymity of each image.

The nature of forgetting is the imperative to remember. Several years ago I visited Auschwitz. I saw the room full of personal objects that I had first seen in Alain Resnais' film, *Night and Fog* (1955); piles of shoes, hair, suitcases, personal items long detached from their owners. The multitude of these objects spoke with the anonymity of multiple, possible voices, to the enormity of the event which had caused them to be there. The objects at Auschwitz provide a memorial, a strategic project in which the reminder of forgetting is what helps us to be certain to remember.

I also spent time in Berlin and it was hard not to notice the traces of war left in the city, bullet holes were still scarred onto walls. I filmed the snow falling on the Holocaust Memorial⁵, a memorial that visually shapes the anonymity of the victims with multiple concrete slabs. The sense of unease and presentness of this event, which had seemed so distantly historical from New Zealand, was something I was very conscious of. I included a sequence of these images, from my personal archive (figure 22), in *A Clowder of Cats*, with a voice-over describing the sensations I experienced.



Figure 22. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (stills from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

⁵ Officially known as the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the monument is located in central Berlin, occupying 19,000 square meters. It was dedicated on May 12, 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII, and is made up of 2,711 gray stone slabs that bear no markings.

6. Memory.

It is worth considering the nature of memory, in relation to photography and its appearance of memory. Sigmund Freud looks at memory as an analogy to a toy, the Mystic Writing Pad, a wax tablet which has a piece of waxed paper and then a sheet of clear plastic on it. When you write or mark the plastic with an instrument the paper adheres, where you press, to the wax slate. If you lift the plastic and paper from the surface of the tablet the marks on the paper disappear, yet remain faintly engraved on the wax (Freud, 2007). These engraved layers of writing are a palimpsest. Like a palimpsest, memories overwrite other memories, sometimes obscuring them completely, sometimes leaving faint traces which can be recalled later.

One of the most influential filmmakers to my practice, Chris Marker, is also one of the few filmmakers to make a film almost entirely from still images, *La Jetée* (1962). It is fitting and deliberate that this film about the nature of memory, is encapsulated in photographs.

The idea that memories become concretised in our minds because of the links they have since made to events of importance is the central theme in *La Jetée*. The film tells the story of a man, marked by an image from his past. The face of a woman (figure 23), he saw on the Jetty at the airport at Orly, as a child, is so strong that it enables him to become a traveller in time. At the end, as he runs towards the woman waiting on the Jetty, a man shoots him, and he realises that the reason her image is so strong in his memory is because she is linked with the act of witnessing his own death as a child (figure 24).



Figure 23. Chris Marker. *La Jetée* (still from film). 1962. Short film, 26 mins.

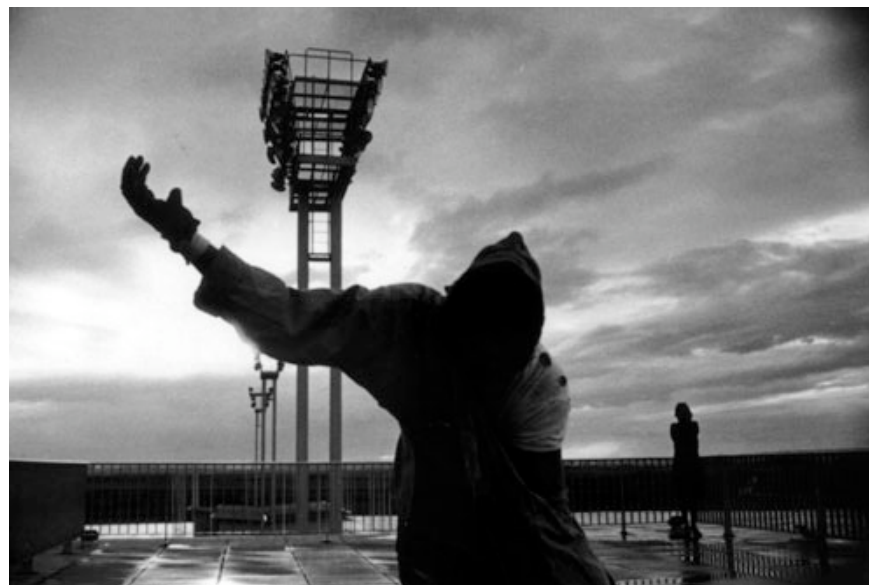


Figure 24. Chris Marker. *La Jetée* (still from film). 1962. Short film, 26 mins.

The memory of the woman's face has remained with the narrator because of its link to the trauma of his own death, but because time is looped, the image has gained meaning from a past event which will also happen in the narrator's future. Jon Kear, in his article *In the Spiral of Time: Memory, Temporality and Subjectivity in Chris Marker's La Jetée*, says that "the history encoded in

Marker's own spiral of time is one that speaks ultimately to the complexities of deciphering the image as a fragment of time detached from its past but which remains imbued with the residual traces of that lost past" (2003, p. 233). What *La Jetée* does is give the context, or the flow of time around that memory of the woman's face, for both the protagonist, but also the viewer. Taken out of the film it is an image of a woman and nothing more, within the film it is both the memory and the foretelling of the narrator's death.

There are moments that sit in vividly in my memory. When my uncle died, a memorial service was held on his fishing boat in Nelson harbour. I clearly remember watching the wreaths slowly disappear under the water and being conscious that I should remember this moment because it was important. I also remember a view of telephone wires against the twilight sky as my sister drove us to visit my Grandma, for what was to be the last time. The first memory is only an image in my mind, the second, I recorded with my camera. How many other moments have I experienced, equally beautiful, but now forgotten because they are devoid of tragic circumstance, or they were never recorded?

7. Recording my ordinary moments.

The cell phone photographs I took of the mornings and days, only reminded me I was forgetting. It made sense to look at using some kind of measure and marker in my life that had some sort of broader relevance, if I wanted to record as a kind of tactic to prevent forgetting.



Figure 25. Christian Boltanski. *6 Septembres* (stills from video). 2005. Video installation, 5mins.



Figure 26. Sophie Calle. *The Birthday Ceremony* (1983). 1998. Mixed media sculpture and photographs, dimensions various.

Christian Boltanski's work *6 Septembres*⁶ (figure 30), and Sophie Calle's *The Birthday Ceremony*⁷ (figure 26), involved recording some kind of event which

⁶ *6 Septembres* involved editing together every newscast televised on the day of his birthday, the 6th of September, every year since he was born. The selection of these images was only guided by the link to his own life, but was part of a wider cultural and social memory.

recurred in the artist's life, but which resonated universally with a viewer: The six o'clock news, and birthdays. These offer an interface between the artist's private life, and the public viewers own private life, so the viewer can access the personal story at offer, in relation to themselves.



Figure 27. Ruth Korver. *Recordings of Friends* (stills from videos of Anna, Tracy, Paula, and Shane). 2008. DV video, lengths various.

I began a process of recording, on video, friends going about their daily lives (figure 27). Recording people around me seemed like a way of making a collection that held more significance than the morning images. I was using a

⁷ *The Birthday Ceremony* was exhibited as an installation, photographic series, and as part of a book. She says "On my birthday I always worry that people will forget me. In 1980, to relieve myself of this anxiety, I decide that every year, if possible on October 9, I would invite to dinner the exact number of people corresponding to my age, including a stranger chosen by one of my guests. I did not use the presents received on these occasions. I kept them as tokens of affection. In 1993, at the age of forty, I put an end to this ritual" (2007, pp. 196 - 197). She does not explain why project is terminated.

cinema vérité/direct cinema approach to filming, and I found that it was difficult to capture my friend's lives unfolding before the lens, as they insisted on interacting with me. These recordings became about the relationship I had with the people I was recording through their interaction with me behind the camera. It made me think that discourse around documentary would be relevant to my work.

In filming Paula, who I had flatted with for over four years, I noticed how much of myself was left in her house, in the way of shared experiences attached to the objects she owned. I photographed these objects and recorded the stories I recalled about them (appendix 3). I incorporated them into what became part of a video portrait of Paula. Like photographs detached from their history, these objects and souvenirs had stories behind them that evoked memories for me.

I recorded mine and my friend's memories of when we first met each other. I wanted to combine these interviews with the recordings of them doing ordinary things as well as photographs of the objects which connected us. These could be combined to present something of a self-portrait through the traces I had left in other people's lives. I experimented with a test work, combining the recording of Paula at home, the interview about our first meeting, and pictures of the objects with stories, from her house. The problem was that it remained so embedded in my own narrative that it was difficult for an audience to access.

I ended up with an organic collection of material in which I saw some possibilities. One was a series of photographs of the windows of the room I

grew up in. It looks out onto the cherry tree where many of the family cats were buried (appendix 4). A video work of the surface of the ocean moving very slowly (appendix 5), reminded me of living near the sea as a child. My father built several boats and I recall family trips out on Nelson harbour. The sea is part of my happy childhood memories, but tinged bittersweet by my uncle's drowning. These works were difficult in that the resonance with myself was important but nothing of these meanings was communicated to an outside spectator.

8. Animating and tracing.

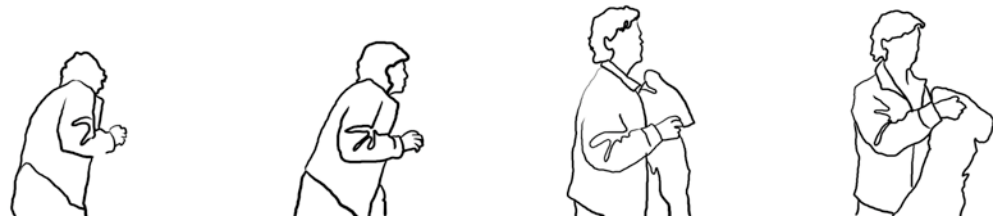


Figure 28. Ruth Korver. Animated Loop of Paula (x5 stills). 2008. Hand drawn animation, DV, 6 minute loop.

I animated some sections of the people I had recorded, by rotoscoping (figure 28). Individually tracing each of several hundred frames of them was another approach to preservation.

Paul Ward looks at documentaries that make use of animation, not just as a technique to demonstrate a particular example, but as an expressive mode within the realm of documentary. He says that the notion of documentary being limited to a factual and realist approach has “...come under challenge in recent times, and engaging with animated documentary demonstrates clearly how documentary can be the realm of subjectivity, fantasy, and non-normative approaches to understanding the world around us” (2005, p. 83). Ward sites documentaries such as *Feeling Space* (Iain Piercy, 1999), which visualises the experiences of two blind men, and *A is for Autism* (Tim Webb, 1992), which attempts to visualise the experience of being autistic. This creative approach can show the viewer something that cannot be simply understood by using visuals of the real world.

Animated projects such as *Going Equipped* (Peter Lord, 1989), use a process of animating “documentary” audio recordings. The authenticity is in the soundtrack and the animated images that accompany it are a creative interpretation. The animated nature of the image results in the audience understanding that what they are seeing is very definitely constructed (Ward, 2005, p. 99). A space is opened up by images that are obviously imagined. Like the space for memory, suggested by Saltzman, an indexical relationship to a referent which is more abstract than the actuality of a photographic representation, allows the audience to imagine things for themselves, while acknowledging the presence of something real.



Figure 29. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.



Figure 30. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

In *A Clowder of Cats*, animation became a tactic for filling in the gaps where I did not have photographs. It was a strategy for dealing with stories there was no evidence of, like Fred, the cat my parents owned before I was born (figure 29), or the murder of crows I never photographed, but wish I had, the Christmas I was in Berlin (figure 30).

There are sections in *A Clowder of Cats* which deal with facts and stories about general cats rather than my own and I used animation for them. These sections offer an opening for an audience to think about their own cats. One section deals with a childhood story-book I had called *The Silent Miaow* by Paul Gallico. It is a manual instructing cats on how to become part of a family, suggesting to the cat that it begin with a despairing miaow at a glass door (figure 31). Another section explains how cats are often named by descriptions of their colouring, something I am not in favour of (figure 32).



Figure 31. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.



Figure 32. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

The final sequence of *A Clowder of Cats* is set in an imagined cat heaven, with all the cats my family has ever owned, floating under falling cherry blossoms (figure 33). This sequence is very much fantastical, a hoped for end to these animals who lived so closely with us.



Figure 33. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

9. My personal archive.

If an attempt to somehow capture all the moments in my life, every morning, every person I had known, was only going to engage in creating more to forget, then it made sense to make sure I remember the memories in the personal archive of photographs that I already have.

Annette Kuhn, in *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*, is interested in the secrets which families have, things absent in the album. Her prime objective is to unravel the traces left for her of her past. She offers some strategies for memory practitioners to examine photographs: Questioning human subjects (who they are, how they might feel about being photographed); the context of production (where and when it was taken); The technical context (what kind of process made it); and finally its currency in the context of reception (who owned it, who looks at it now) (Kuhn, 1995, p. 8). This sort of approach helps understand personal images in a public context as well, by understanding that its process and existence are part of a history of this kind of image (Kuhn, 1995, p. 9).

The two people who disappear from my albums are my uncle and my grandma. One of the striking pieces of material in my archive was a short segment of video taken in my grandma's house after she died (appendix 6). Most of her valued items had been packed away for friends and family. What remained was an array of daily objects that tell perhaps as little, the story about the

woman who lived there, as any photograph could tell the story of the person in it.

I played the footage to my sister and recorded audio of us as we watched. We did not describe what we saw, instead we talked about events we remembered which were triggered by the items. The handle from her chair, which was where she sat the last time we saw her, was an object we played with as children. It recalled playing with the brass knob from her bed head. The Edmonds Cookbook brought on an argument over whether we remembered her cooking or not. Her crystal glasses, which my sister now has, reminded us of her funeral. These memories, sometimes similar, sometimes divergent, served to highlight the different relationships we had had with our grandma. The nature of the footage revealed very little in terms of the person in it, opening it up to a universal experience of absence and loss. What it did reveal was precisely how Langford calls us to read the album, allowing stories and anecdotes to flow from the images as we talked about them. The magic of it all was that I had my camera there as those stories were discussed, and recorded them.

10. Reading my archive.



Figure 34. Photographer unknown. Ruth Korver on her fourth birthday, 31/7/82. 1982. 35mm photograph, 9 x 13cm. Collection of Mary and Geoff Korver.

Of the photographs that I have, the majority are of people stopping to look at the camera while the shot is taken. Perhaps if my family were documentary photographers then events may have been gathered, but as it is the image of my fourth birthday for example (figure 34), is just an image of me, standing there holding a pet. This is where the album, the layout, the relationships, the notes on the backs of the photographs, can offer clues about what these images can say.



Theo pig" having a friendly chat to
 "Corpiam" who is very naughty. Corpiam
 learned how to undo the latch of his cage,
 and he goes for secret excursions round
 the neighborhood. Then he comes in the
 middle of the night, scratches on the door until
 I let him in, wanting to play with me.
 He is still good friend with the pussies, but
 I think he needs a Rabbit friend.

from Rose Michael & Dan
 Ruth and Anna

Figure 35. Photographer unknown. Theo the guinea pig and rabbit friend with a letter on the reverse. 35mm photograph, 18 x 10.5 cm. Collection of Ruth Korver.



Figure 36. Geoff Korver. Photograph album page. 1983. 35mm photographs and labels on black album paper, 29 x 26cm. Collection of Mary and Geoff Korver.

On the back of a photograph of a guinea pig I was told I owned but don't remember having, I found a note from a woman who is apparently my godmother (figure 35). There is a tableau of a Christmas when my grandma visited which includes an image of the main Christmas day dish (figure 36). There are few photographs of my mother. Oddly I do not associate her with taking photographs, only my father, but the evidence suggests otherwise. As digital photography comes into existence the archive explodes in number. It is a different experience looking at digital images, without the nature of the object, they lose something, but more details are recorded with them, they are saved in folders with dates and place names.

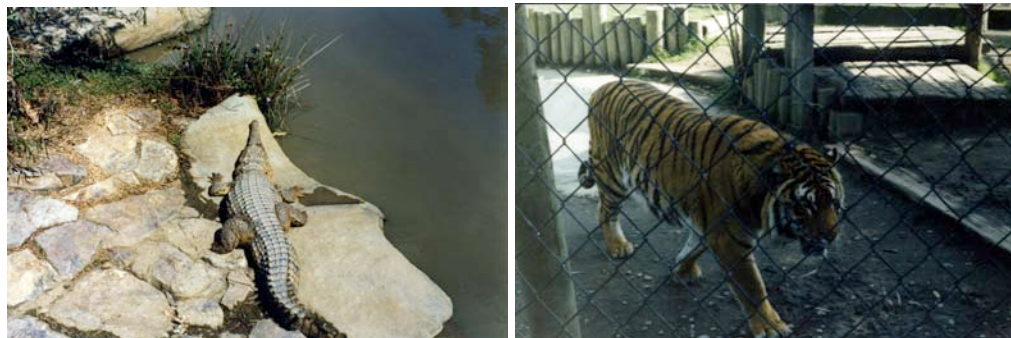


Figure 37. Ruth Korver. Two photographs of animals. c.1983. 35mm photographs, 15 x 10.5cm. Collection of Ruth Korver.



Figure 38. Photographer unknown. Photograph of Rupert. c.1998. 35mm photograph, 15 x 10cm. Collection of Mary and Geoff Korver.

Images often become markers for mythic stories about family members (Langford, 2001, p. 136). If I read my images in the way Langford suggests, there are repetitions of animals and cats (figure 37 & 38). Many of the animal photographs are from the time when my sister and I were learning to use a camera. Cats are the particular heroes in my archive, especially black cats. An ex-boyfriend of mine once commented on the way in which my family is obsessed with telling stories about the cats we have had. Even now, when all the family cats are dead, the only photograph on the sideboard in my parent's kitchen is of Georgia, our last cat, carefully put in a silver frame (figure 39). Uncovering these stories and preserving them is the motivation that began to surround this project. What I wanted to do was tell the stories my family has, so that I can remember them, but also so that they will not disappear when we are no longer there to tell them.



Figure 39. Ruth Korver. Sideboard with photograph of Georgia and Dad. 2008. Digital photograph.

Anecdotes and tales told in the living memory of Kracauer's linguistic communication are family memory, as opposed to cultural memory, and are limited to life spans. Assman says family memory "...is not meant to be

stabilised and does not promise to be eternal. It is restricted by the temporal limitations of life” (2006, p. 92). It is within cultural memory, in what becomes known as history, that family stories can live longer.

Berger suggests that incorporating photography into social and political, public memory, calls for a new approach to reading and making photographs.

Working more in the way that memory does, a radial approach, which involves situating a photograph amongst other texts and signs (Berger, 1980, p. 62), offers a way to keep photographs in “...a living context (...) instead of being arrested moments” (Berger, 1980, p. 57).

Langford suggests that new ways of investigating photography, especially using digital technology, can record stories along with the images (2006, p. 166). An archive project called *Project Naming*, begun in 2001, involved recording stories about photographs taken in Nunavut, the Inuit homeland, since the 1870s. Students visited elders and asked them to name people in the images. “From these digital images, the names came, and with the names came stories” (Langford, 2006, p. 167).

One of the methods I used to gather stories around my images, especially the family cats, was to set up a blog. Comments could be submitted to each image, allowing my family, which is spread across the country, to attach stories to the images in a way which is flexible and shared. This was a way to capture some of the stories, which in Langford’s orality, would otherwise have to be told together, in the same space.

11. Cats to measure time.

How to put together all my own records to try to understand the traces I have left behind in the world, became the focus of my thesis project, *A Clowder of Cats*, a single channel documentary video. As heroes of my family albums, cats emerged as a relevant way of demarcating the duration of my history. They have led short lives that have added up to the duration of my own life, so the constancy of their loss has been a facet of my growing up.

The ordinary cat is the ordinary moment. The images of the cats are just images of cats, but in seeing those images, the memories of how I lived around each animal came back. The heroic fables that have evolved from them are part of my family's oral culture, for who will ever write the stories of the cats down for historical longevity? They are unimportant.

The idea of a lost multitude was what inspired the name *A Clowder of Cats*. I saw flocks of crows constantly in Europe, but never managed to photograph them. The collective noun for a flock of crows is murder. Most animals have some kind of collective noun and the one for cats is clowder.

La Jetée began with cats. In an interview with Chris Marker about *La Jetée*, he explains that the first film he ever made was a series of drawings of his cat. He explains how he showed it to a friend, Jonathan: "I was rather pleased with result, and I unrolled the adventures of the cat Riri which I presented as "my movie", Jonathan managed to get me sobered up: "Movies are supposed to

move, stupid”, he said. “Nobody can do a movie with still images.” Thirty years passed. Then I made *La Jetée*” (Marker, 1998, p. 66).

Cats are universal creatures. We have all had pets, we have all lost someone, and we all have photographs.

12. Considering documentary.

In telling “real” events with moving image, *A Clowder of Cats* fits into the discourse of documentary. Documentary as a genre has been somewhat burdened by its perceived ability and obligation to tell truth. Ironically John Grierson “...who introduced the term documentary, at least into English, is famous for having called it the creative treatment of actuality” (Currie, 1999, p. 285). Batchen tells us that “as early as 1859 the American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes called photography the mirror with a memory...” (2004, p. 8). Despite the inability of an image to represent anything more than its appearance, documentary seems to have inherited the expectation of capturing the truth. Increasingly, as the mode questions itself, the role of documentary not to tell the truth but to offer possible truths, as diverse as the memories of any event, expands.

Gregory Currie attempts to define documentary, beginning with the idea that photographs exist through a physical emanation of light from the referent, giving us a trace of the world. For something to be documentary, he argues, it relies on the use of visible traces, that are not subverted into the narrative but that reinforce the narrative (Currie, 1999, p. 296). He says “...that a documentary must involve traces of its subject, and not merely testimony of it” (Currie, 1999, p. 286). He acknowledges that what we call documentaries often carry sections of re-enactments or re-imaginings, but claims that these parts are fake because the real trace is not present for the narrative to draw meaning from.

I am not so concerned about a rigid fit with “documentary” in Currie’s terms. Ward’s ideas about animation fulfilling the possibility of imagined or fantastical elements are excused from documentary for Currie. It is this act of using traces to feed into a narrative that interests me. The use of my photographs to feed and trigger a story about me and my family, based on the traces that remain, was the central process for scripting *A Clowder of Cats*. The process of how I remember and the inaccuracies that arise from that, are part of this work. When writing the script, I added a section about recalling a photograph of me holding a black cat called Ponsonby (figure 40). I remembered that I wore a blue dress and was looking at the camera. When I went to scan the photograph I found that there were in fact two photographs and my description of the image, as scripted, was incorrect, but for the audience to understand the nature of my remembering, I retained my original description in the video.



Figure 40. Geoff Korver. Two photographs of Ruth and Ponsonby. c.1980. 35mm photograph, 10 x 15cm. Collection of Ruth Korver,

Linda Williams, in her article *Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History and the new documentary*, talks about recent documentaries, such as *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1987), *Roger and Me* (Michael Moore, 1989), and *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), which explore how the possibility of multiple truths rather than the presentation of the existence of one truth, can be achieved using techniques more often associated with narrative drama. She claims a post-modern approach for the films she analyses, in that they revisit the past by understanding it in the present. *The Thin Blue Line*, for example, was successful in "...intervening in the truths known about the past" (Williams, 1993, p. 12) by dealing with the murder of police officer Robert Wood through a confession that the wrong man had been convicted of the crime.

Recorded images are not mirrors with a memory, instead Williams suggests that truth is like a fragmentary shard, showing the past in reverberation with the present. In telling personal stories truth is subjective to individual experience, and memory, a single shard, is never a certain truth. She says "the lesson rather, is that there can be historical depth to the notion of truth – not the depth of unearthing a coherent and unitary past, but the depth of the past's reverberation with the present" (Williams, 1993, p. 20). What Williams offers, is another way of using one's archive in a documentary format. Rather than just presenting a set of visible traces from which narrative forms, documentary can incorporate multiple reverberations with the present, in which the possibility of false and sliding memory can be understood. It can reveal not just what happened, but what the archive means now and how it has shaped us to live in the present.

Michael Renov deals with the role of the medium “To Record, Reveal, or preserve (...) to cheat death, stop time, restore loss” (Renov, 1993, p. 25).

Renov addresses the diary film. Artists like Jonas Mekas who work in terms of personal documentary are moving beyond simple preservation or recording by contextualising their experience in the work. (1993, p. 25). Renov advises us to be careful of simply gathering historical recordings. Histiography needs some kind of interrogation by the filmmaker who translates the material gathered (Renov, 1993, p. 27).

Bill Nichols calls this diaristic, or personal approach, the performative mode of documentary. Shifting the boundary between the personal and public, documentary and fiction, the performative mode is a space open for subjective and personal ideas rather than the exposition of knowledge, truth or information. (Nichols, 1994, p. 94).

The essay film might fall into the performative documentary space, at least as a genealogical precursor. An essay film is another way of describing the kind of subjective, personal film, that I am aligning my *A Clowder of Cats* with. Kevin MacDonald and Mark Cousins describe the essayists: “In the 1950s a new generation of film-makers began to reject the restrictive notion that documentary was merely a medium for mass communication and ‘social betterment’. Instead they looked at documentary as a means to express strong personal opinions and points of view” (1996, p. 211). Works like *F is for fake*

(Orson Welles ,1974), *Night and Fog* (Alain Resnais, 1955), and *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, 1983) fit this category.

Sans Soleil (*Sunless*) is structured around a female narrator, who reads letters sent to her by the filmmaker. The visuals are images of his travels, edited together, almost as a flow of remembered moments. Watching *Sans Soleil* is a strange experience, like grasping at glimpsed memories. Afterwards, if someone asks what it is about, you may recall odd afterimages of people in a Tokyo cemetery, praying for their lost cats.

The film begins with an image of three children on the road to Iceland in 1965. The woman's narration tells: "He said that for him it was the image of happiness and also that he had tried several times to link it to other images. But it had never worked" (Marker, 1983). Explicit in this is the process of putting together images. Terrence Rafferty imagines Marker alone in the editing room, piecing together images and meaning from works he has made before (1996, p. 243). *Sans Soleil* suggests that memories or images gathered, mount up to a collective whole. "In one passage, the film proposes that what passes for collective history might be nothing more than an accumulation of private memories and wounds" (Lupton, 2005, p. 157).

The essay film is the space to deal with the cats. Using my own memories, expanded by conversations with my family, in person and via the blog, my photographs can come to life, essentially animated by sound and by the narrative which ties them all together. Whether it is called performative or

essayistic, there is hope that my own story can be interesting, and by inserting it into a public space, perhaps it can be remembered historically rather than fading as part of family memory.

13. A Clowder of Cats.

A Clowder of Cats (appendix 7 for script, appendix 8 for final DVD), is not just a video about all the cats my family has owned, it is a catalogue of the losses we have suffered, from my perspective. Mostly autobiographical, it is also about leaving home and the inevitable loss that occurs as you part to go your own way.

It is a personal history of a kind, but a post-modern idea of history. These cat images are revisited and reinterpreted with the benefit of hindsight. The importance of some things has faded, others stayed along with the stories about them, or been recaptured and reconstructed.

An investigation into the way we use photographs to remember is fitting for this kind of story. Kuhn says that “the past is gone forever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it as it was” (1995, p. 4), which brings to mind the saying: “you can never go home”. You can in fact go home, but the home you recall, is in the past. Each return you find things changed, until your home is your parent’s house. Every time I go back to visit my parents in Christchurch, it is less familiar. I often find myself lost driving around the city, it is a different place from the one I recall.

I have no woman’s face, no frozen sun, to drag me back in time. The past is a lonely country and to dally too long there brings sadness and nostalgia. To

stare too long at a photograph is to invite the idea of loss. So loss becomes the central theme that circles my cat story.

Understanding my archive in terms of Langford's oral structure and the strategies offered by Kuhn provided a way for me to tell stories about it and to gather stories from my family. To turn it into an artwork informed by these stories, but not simply re-telling them, is where ideas around documentary and the essay film became important. *A Clowder of Cats* is told through a narrative voice-over (my own voice), which expresses the catalogue of loss of my cats and of family members who have passed away, but also my experience in viewing images from the past and thinking about the things I didn't remember, were missing or had never known.

Initially large parts of it involved the recordings I took of my friends, but as I narrowed down on the relationship I have with my family, most of this footage disappeared. The ones which remained, the images of my bedroom window and the cherry tree, the ocean, and the brief glimpse of the view from the car as I travelled to see my grandma, gained a context that could be read by an audience in the broader narrative, which they did not have as individual works.

Audio animated the still images. The roar of lions accompanies images of my first photographs while the ocean laps behind the image of my family in Seaweed, one the boats my father built (figure 41).



Figure 41. Photographer unknown. Korver family in Seaweed, Nelson. c.1983. 35mm photograph, 13.5 x 9cm. Collection of Ruth Korver.

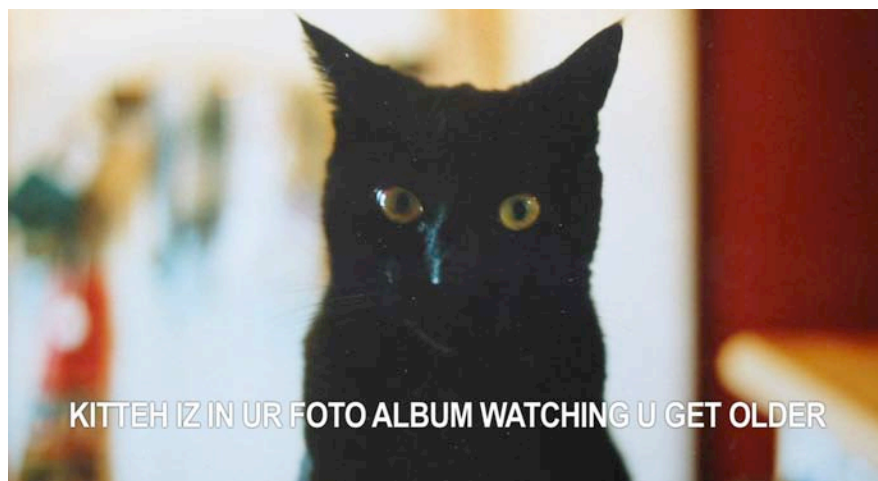


Figure 42. Ruth Korver. A Clowder of Cats (still from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

Cat facts and lolcats⁸ (figure 42) have been a big part of this project.

Whenever I tell people I am making a film about cats I receive emails, tit-bits, and facts, such as how many storeys a cat can fall and still survive, or links to the latest lolcat. These elements became part of the work, almost as part of a conversation with the rest of the world about their cats.

⁸ Lolcat is the name of the internet meme 'laugh out loud' cat. A lolcat is a photograph, usually of a cat, that is captioned in an amusing way. The caption is in lolcat language which has simplistic, phonetic spelling, and follows established rules within the lolcat community.



Figure 43. Ruth Korver. *A Clowder of Cats* (stills from video). 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins.

The sequence about leaving at last is photographed at the airport from which I flew away from (figure 43). Like *La Jetée*, the images are black and white, from an uncertain time. The planes wait on the tarmac, I stare with the camera into the sky. These are, of course, not the images I saw when I first left. Much of this video has been recreated. Images that are evidence of the past are combined with images taken at other times, or especially for this project, to highlight moments forgotten.

A scrapbook, an album, a narrative, a documentary, a catalogue of loss. *A Clowder of Cats* is intended to be all of these things, to bring my past back for others to see and to think of their own pasts.

14. Returning from the past.

I am one of the many, it seems, who has been compelled to gaze at my photographs. If recording everything all the time became a process of forgetting, looking back and recalling the archive was a process of remembering, of bringing my own past into the present. Batchen claims that this desire to bring the past back, by embellishing photographs, is not just about remembering those lost, but about our own impossible desire to be remembered, as we look into a future where we are certain we will be forgotten (Batchen, 2004, p. 98).

This desire is not entirely futile. *A Clowder of Cats* has incorporated more information into itself than surrounds the single photographs it is made from. This video is not so much a memorial as a strategy of remembrance. My life is ordinary and I wanted to bring these things back, if only so I could be certain I recalled them.

The photograph doesn't hold enough information to replace memory, but Berger's strategy of inserting photographs into a radial structure of signs that are more akin to memory points to their role as an *aide memoire*, part a texture of ways of remembering. The images in *A Clowder of Cats* are no longer solely private images waiting for their story to be told, but are now part of a temporal narrative that situates them so that they are accessible by viewers outside my family. The stories themselves are still personal to my

family, but this work now has the potential to drift out and for the narrative to be understood by others, in connection with their own stories.

The camera has allowed me to capture many ordinary moments, as well as left me an archive of ordinary moments, but no moment is ordinary for the person who looks back on it. The camera gives us a strategy to remember what may otherwise have been forgotten, to bring the thoughts back from the dead and let that ordinary moment, whatever it may have been, back into our lives.

15. Tiny cat epilogue.

My partner and I recently got our own cat. As I write this, we have only had him for a week, yet already there are more photographs of him, than all the photographs of all the cats my family has owned.

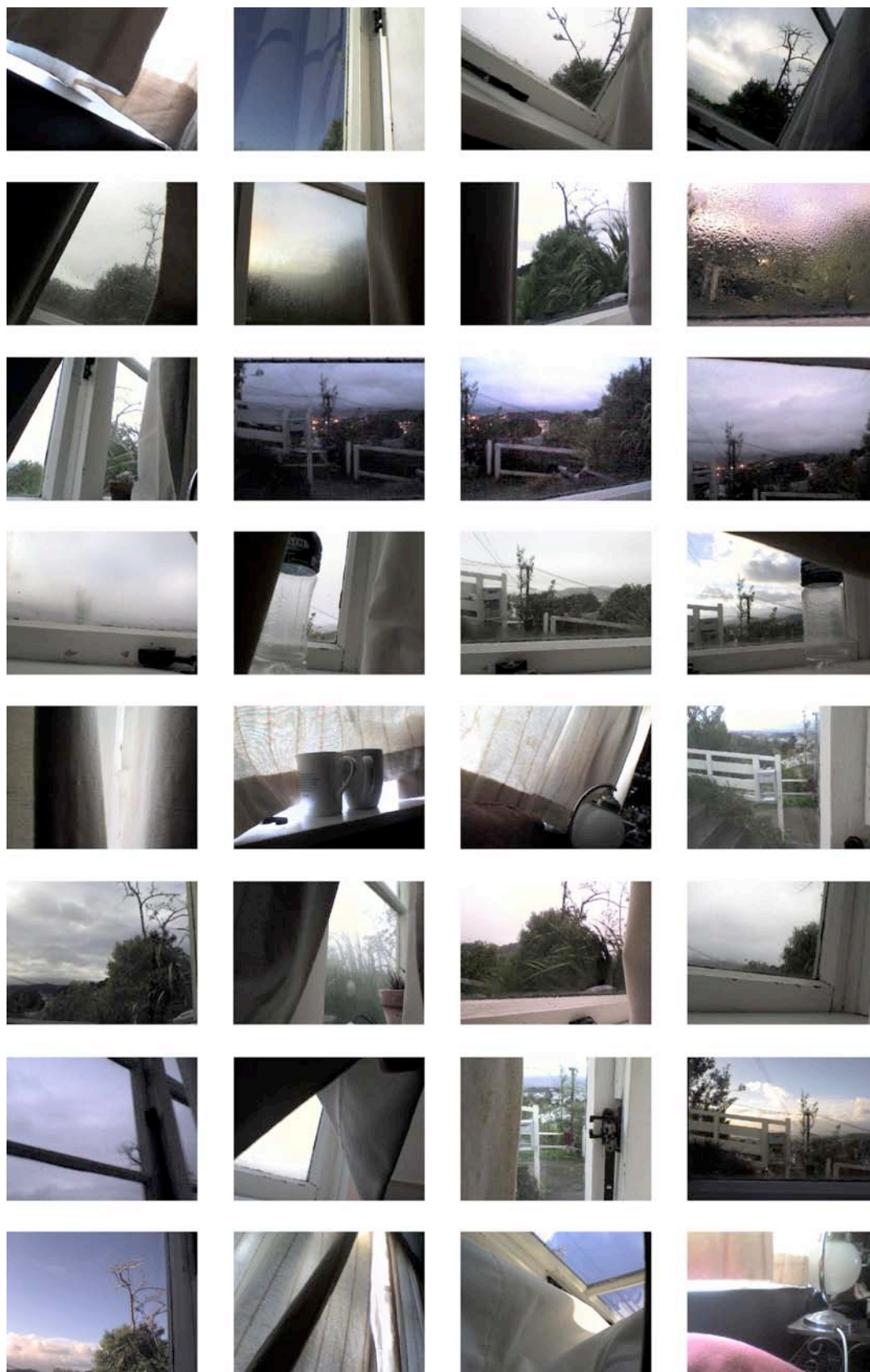
These images are all digital and many have been uploaded to gallery and social networking sites on the internet. I wonder how my future children will ever make sense of their traces when they do what I am doing now. Their archive will be enormous, interlinked in the public space of the Internet, and not exist as physical objects. Will the link to memory become stronger or weaker in this overwhelming record which has no physical tangibility? The loss of the photographic object is yet another loss in the story of photographs.



Figure 42. Ruth Korver. Captain Rosco Busta Murphy. 2009. Digital photograph.

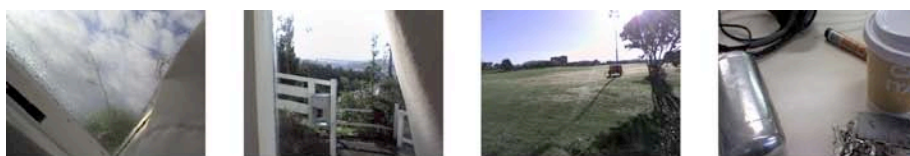
Appendix 1. Mornings series.

Ruth Korver. Mornings. 2008. Cell phone photographs, dimensions variable.

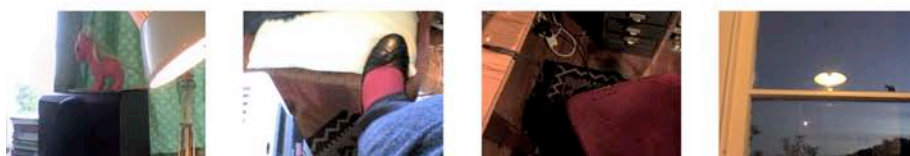


Appendix 2. Day series.

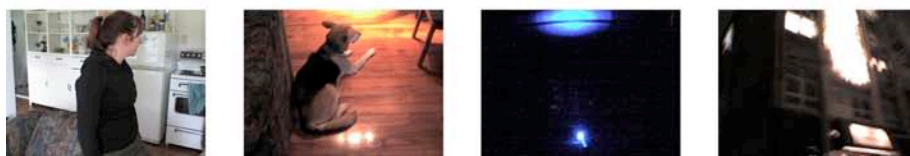
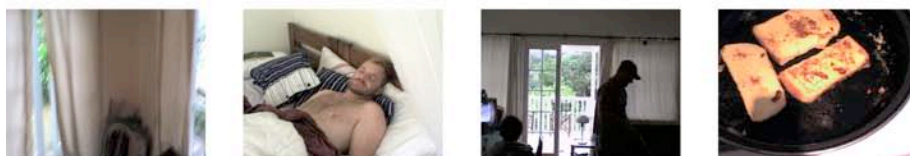
Ruth Korver. Days. 2008. Cell phone photographs, 42 x 29.7cm (each set).



10.4.08 7am - 2pm



13.4.08 8am - 7pm



26.4.08 9am - 8pm

Appendix 3. Paula's Things series.

Ruth Korver. Paula's Things. 2008. Stills from single channel DV video, 13mins.



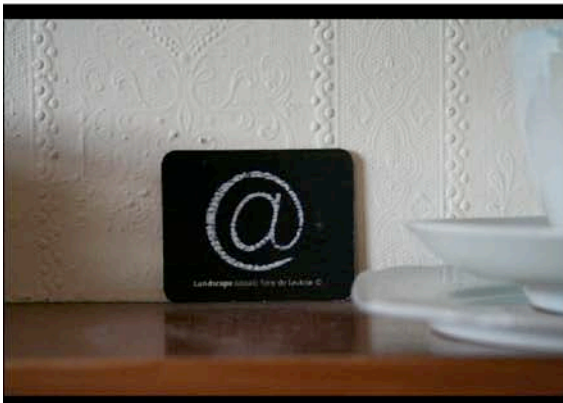
This table was where I first met Paula. She was sitting at it when she interviewed me for a flat.



After the original Hawker street flat we moved to Oriental Parade with Nicole. Here we are dressed up for a shotgun wedding themed engagement party for some friends.



The gas heater at Oriental Parade meant that this was the warmest flat I ever lived in.



This was a birthday present I bought Paula from the Christchurch City Art Gallery.



This belonged to Paula's Grandma. As a child she used to watch the fish. We kept it in front of the heater when it wasn't on.



This is a moose toy from Poland. Our friend Tim said it looks like a kumara with a face. It is named Alberto after an Italian man we met who had been stranded after his car broke down and his friend ran off with a girl.



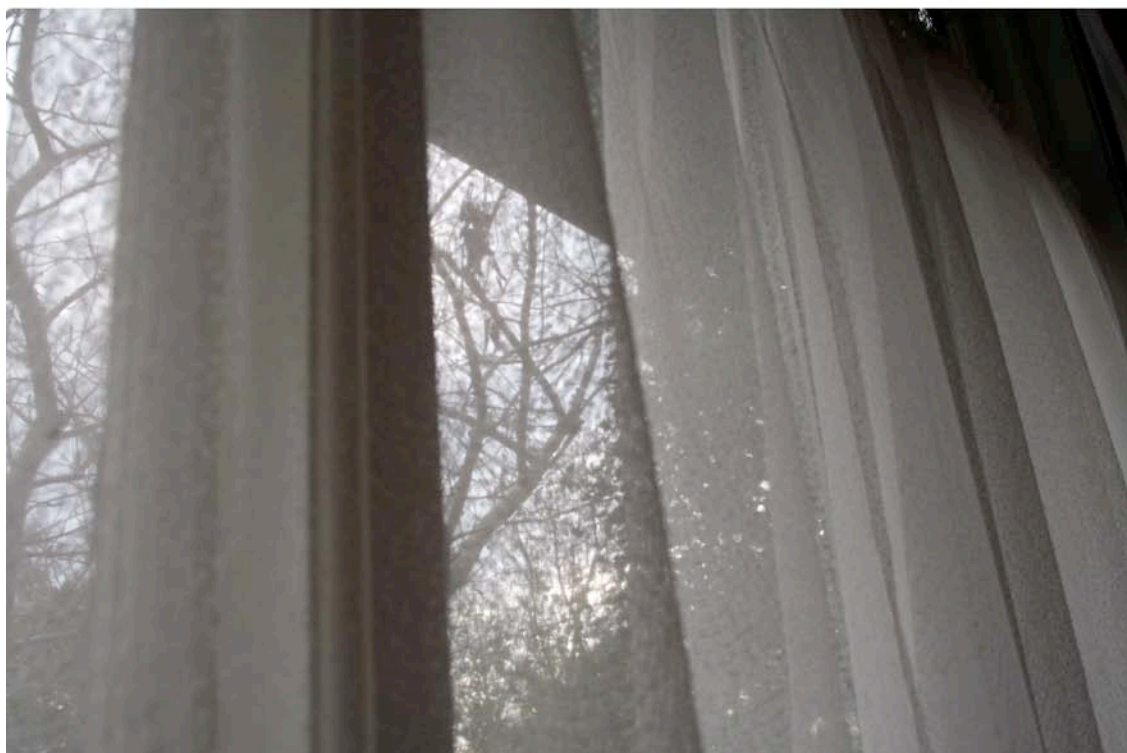
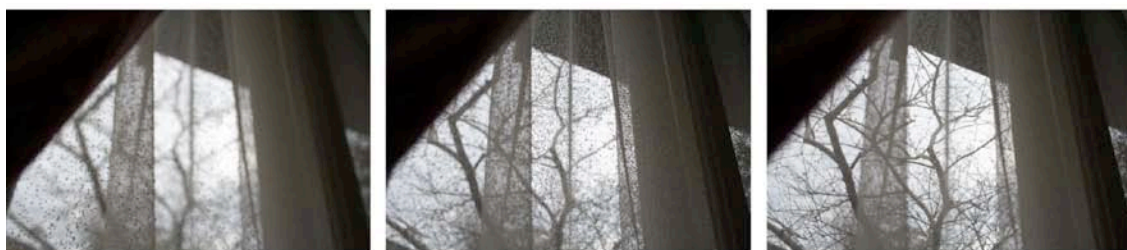
This cup was stolen from the first flat we lived in together. Paula loves owls.



This was an exchange for another, unwanted 30th birthday present.

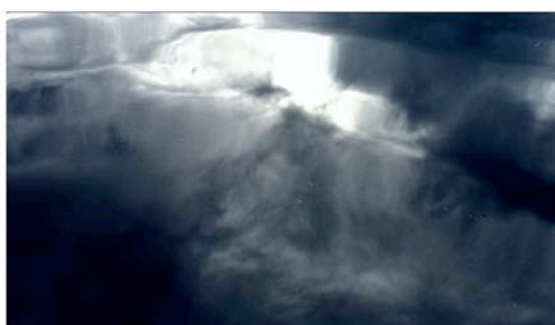
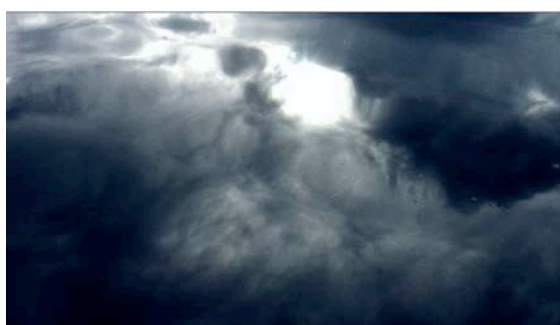
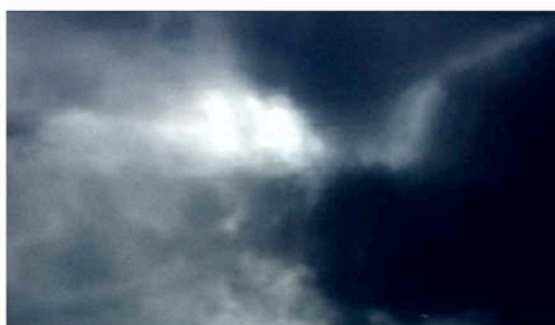
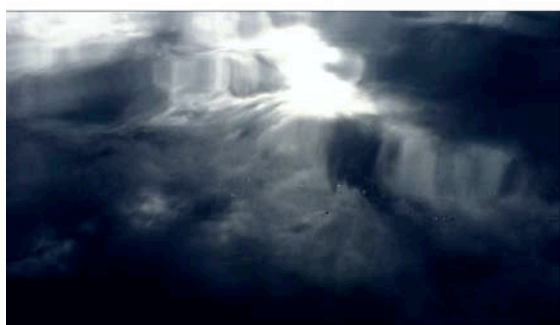
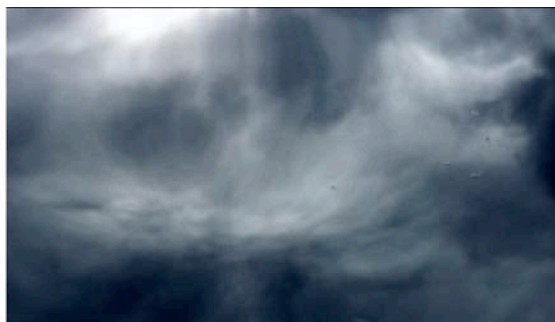
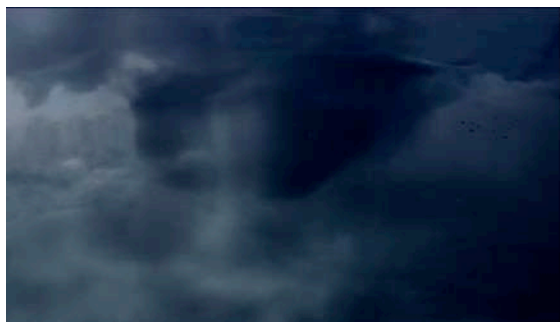
Appendix 4. The Cherry Tree From My Bedroom Window.

Ruth Korver. The Cherry Tree From My Bedroom Window. 2008. Digital photographs, dimensions variable.



Appendix 5. Water Clouds.

Ruth Korver. Water Clouds. 2008. Stills from single channel HDV video loop, 40 mins.



Appendix 6. Objects in My Grandma's House.

Ruth Korver. Grandma's House. 2008. Stills from DV video.



Appendix 7. A Clowder of Cats script.

Ruth Korver. A Clowder of Cats. 2009. Script for single channel HD video, 16 mins.

A Clowder of Cats.

It begins with a cat in the rain. I watch as the cat moves, pushing a space through the raindrops. They soak into the cat and affect it, as the cat affects their path. But after the cat has passed away into the night the raindrops flow down into the sea, eventually forgetting that brief meeting.

The Silent Miaow, as described by Paul Gallico in his manual for kittens strays and homeless cats, is the name given to the special pitiful look the kitten gives you through the door. It is a sort of opening of the mouth without sound, designed to encourage humans to let the kitten in where it can insinuate itself into the family and exploit the kindness of strangers.

Lives can be measured by individual moments or by sections of time. Our photo albums are stocked with fractions of these seconds that remind us of times past, moments forgotten and people lost. Images of places visited, events recorded, people loved, these moments and the days between add up to a lifetime. The lives of our pets are short enough to punctuate and measure these lifetimes. My family has always had cats to mark our passage. The lives of these vanished animals have timed out our existence as a family.

FRED

At the moment I came into existence my parents were accompanied by a cat called Fred. He was technically the first of our family cats. I imagine him smiling up from a bland Masterton carpet.

I can only imagine him, because there is no evidence of Fred's existence. He is a story told by my mother among other tales of my parents' life before my sister and I arrived.

THE MYTH OF THE BLACK CAT

I was born in Hamilton in 1978. My mother's pregnancy was jealously watched by my first tangible cat and breeder of the family legend of the black cat.

Each family has its own stories, myths which evolve from memory to give a place to that group of people. Ponsonby started our family belief that black cats have a special quality. Filled with cunning and intelligence, the black cat is the preferred feline.

PONSONBY

Ponsonby ate rabbits and hated me. I dragged him around by the neck and he ran off to live with an old lady down the road.

I don't remember Ponsonby, instead I picture a photograph: A small blonde girl with ribbons in her hair stares out of the frame. She wears a blue dress and she is wrapping her arms around a large black cat which she has pinned to the ground. The photograph proves the existence of the cat but also of the time before I have memories.

ULLYSES SIMPSON GRANT

The longest standing family cat and the least-remembered.

Ulyses travelled with us to Nelson. I remember sitting in the back of the car as we drove down the hill to our new house. I remember my sister for the first time. I remember the cakes we had for our first and third birthdays.

In the way pets belong to a family but always to a single member, Ulyses was my father's.

I remember talking about him and photos of him, but I cannot conjure up the cat itself. He is a blurred cat on the edge of sight that I can almost grasp, but then the memory fades back to the photograph.

MICHAEL

When we were five and seven my sister and I acquired Michael Underfoot Trouble Toast-Stealer Micycle-Bicycle. He was an ill-adjusted cat, perhaps from swimming lessons, being dressed up and the occasional drop from a tree.

In a study of one hundred and fifty cats falling from New York buildings, cats falling from seven storeys or higher had a better chance of surviving than cats falling from lower storeys. At thirty-two storeys cats reach terminal velocity which is about sixty kmph. They are springy enough to land at this speed on all four paws. The longer fall relaxes them and they spreadeagle themselves, preparing to land.

We shifted across Nelson and I left my best friend behind. I started a new school and wished I could hide under the duvet for two weeks like Ulysses did.

Michael ran away. He was later found at the SPCA but my mother denied it was him and refused to let us take him home. It is only recently that she has admitted this.

SOOTY

Sooty was mark two in the canon of black cats. He belonged to my sister but really to himself.

Sooty, snowy, ginger, boots, grey: These are shameful animal names. Descriptions, not names, like shorty, or blondie, but conferred with affection nevertheless.

Sooty ran away although really he may have lived a double life all along, one of the defining traits of the mysterious black cat.

My uncle looked after us in the school holidays and it was always so much fun. I remember him buying us packets of chicken chips from the customhouse hotel at Nelson Port. Once, his friend caught a wild pig. He had it in the back of his truck in the car park and Uncle Peter cut off a leg to take home for a roast.

When he drowned my sister and I played Amazing Grace at his service, but I can't remember that, at all. I only remember being on his fishing boat in the middle of Tasman bay. It was a beautiful day and the ocean was perfectly still. People threw wreaths into the water and you could see them slowly sinking as we drove back to the harbour. That image is one of my clearest memories.

ASTROPHE

Our cat Astrophe had, as my uncle described it, "a lovely coat". He was a golden lion cat and my favourite of the family cats.

His attractiveness is highlighted by the fact that he has the second largest number of photographs of him, although I suspect this is also tied in with the time when my father would set up the exposure and let us take our first photographs. Our albums are filled with blurry pictures of animals from zoo visits, the first things we were eager to capture.

Astrophe came to Christchurch with us, but later when we'd found a house. He arrived on the plane, howling like his world was ending. He had the voice of a child and thought he was human. He'd meow at the window in the mornings and wait at the table when dinner was served.

Astrophe was run over by a car on the road outside our house. I was angry at my parents for shifting us, for moving schools again, the death of the cat was another thing they had done.

We buried him under the cherry tree outside my bedroom window.

RUPERT AND PUSSY-WUMPKINS

Pussy-Wumpkins died in less than six months from a congenital heart defect (not the shameful name). We buried her under the cherry tree with Astro. All of our houses have had pet cemetery areas, with tiny wooden crosses and flowers we tended until we forgot.

Rupert is the cat who has the biggest aura. He was the third black cat, the cat of our uncomfortable teenage years, the cat who lives on in everyone's memory as an enormous presence.

He is the most photographed cat in our family and the cat photographed most by himself.

My mother still insists that he is alive, that he lives nearby at the retirement village, that he moved on, not passed away.

Lolcats are laugh out loud cats, a name given to the internet phenomenon where people take photographs of their cats and place them online with slightly hilarious captions written in a kind of cat text speak. Rupert would have made a great lolcat but sadly predated the fad.

GEORGIA

Georgia replaced Pussy-Wumpkins and after Rupert disappeared she took over. Mum would email me tales of what the cat was doing. I would catch my parents leaving the heater on for her, she was fed fresh meat and never left alone for holidays.

Strangely it seemed she was entirely beloved, yet there is only one photograph of her.

She was a cat's cat. She hunted, she ate, she allowed small amounts of affection. She lived in parallel, at home in the domestic world but passed into the wild outside at night.

In 2000 I left home properly and moved to Wellington. Anyone who has left for another city will know the time it takes for a new place to become home. I remember flying to Christchurch and at some point it was the trip back that became the return home.

I suppose I had already lost my grandmother a little when she died. I saw her often when I was a child but as I grew older and she more frail, I saw little of her.

When I arrived at her funeral there were only her practical household items left in her house. Her treasures and personal things had been packed away. I sought to find some clues to who she had been amongst what remained and found reminders attached to her cookbook, of a competition to make vegetable animals, and the chair with the handle we played with as children.

Even in these generic items the power to trigger memories of the past remained. Like photographs these objects bought back moments I'd thought lost. Ordinary moments for certain, yet still something to recall the past before it was tidied away and gone forever.

The year Georgia died I went to Europe. I spent Christmas in Berlin. I found myself in a city filled with the tiny traces of trauma left behind, like scars carved into rock. There was a sense of unease, a sense of the enormity of a project of remembering, whether the victim or the perpetrator it was recent, complex and entirely present in a way the safety of New Zealand had never communicated.

In 1945 a strange curly haired black stray was found in bombed ruins in Berlin. Named Lamchen, she was the beginning of the German Rex breed of show cats.

I too found myself lost, near a cemetery filled with a flock of crows. A murder of crows it is called. A murder of crows, a terror of ravens, a clowder of cats.

That Christmas when there was no family cat to go home to was the first Christmas my family has spent apart. There will be no more family cats. I will have cats, my sister will have cats and my parents will have cats but they will be new, different and not family cats.

I stand in the hallway and look up through the gap in the ceiling where the internet cat's god lurks. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, all good kittys go to heaven...

Appendix 8. A Clowder of Cats.

Ruth Korver. A Clowder of Cats. 2009. Single channel HD video, 16 mins. Presented on DVD.

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